

WESTERN BALKANS

and Turkey

Lead

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Structural barriers and negative trends

Patriarchal culture and traditions still prevail, underpinning unbalanced power and discrimination of women and girls reproducing diverse structural gender inequalities in key areas of life: political participation, education, health, armed and police forces, access to economic resources, economic participation and division of responsibilities in family life, living standard and quality of life. As the most severe means of maintaining this social structure violence against women and girls is used at different levels of the society in public and private relations.

Common legacies

These are post-communist societies with specific legacy: despite authoritarian rule, there were significant achievements in access of women to education, employment and participation in public life. However, strong private patriarchy persisted, manifested through unequal division of responsibilities for family which underpinned recent trends of re-patriarchization.

These are post-conflict societies: war conflicts and social and economic crisis had severe consequences for gender equality since the break-down of socialism. They weakened position of women in public sphere and pushed them to private sphere to take care of family during hard times. They widened economic inequalities with adverse impacts on women's and girls' human, social, cultural and economic rights. They contributed to the high prevalence of violence against women and girls in public and private sphere: violent discourse against women in public life (politicians, journalists, etc.); high prevalence of sexual harassment, high prevalence of intimate partner and domestic violence with severe consequences for wellbeing of women, girls and high femicide rates.

Key common contemporary structural barriers

Lower access of women and girls to important social resources: jobs (huge activity and employment gender gaps); property (women are left without land, housing, production means, due to patriarchal inheritance patterns); segregation in education which reflects in the labour market segregation with women concentrating in care related sectors, social services with lower employment prospects and lower salaries; wage and pension gender gaps leading to higher risks of poverty among women, particularly older, single mothers, migrant, rural, Roma and Egyptian women, and other marginalized groups; lower access to political, economic and social power positions, obstacles in decision-making participation related to intra-political party clientelist mechanisms, exchange of favours and resources which mainly leave women out of exchange; disproportionate responsibility in performing unvalued unpaid work related to the family care; prominent intersecting inequalities, with numerous minority and marginalized groups of women which face even higher obstacles for social inclusion.

Dominant political discourses and cultures across the region reproduce gender stereotypes and gender inequalities. Renewed rise of authoritarianism, antifeminism, far-right, populist and movements opposed to the principles of gender equality, girls and women's freedoms, are on the rise in the Region and globally, manifested, among other things, as attacks on feminism, abortion rights and LGBTIQ rights with justification of 'protecting the family' and traditional local values. Role of media is the crucial in reproducing prejudice, stereotypes and representing women in inappropriate ways, controlled by political elites. Education programmes and contents are not gender sensitive and gender responsible there is lack of holistic sexual-reproductive health and rights education. Gender studies are few and not sufficiently supported. Feminist movements and organizations are struggling to provide sustainability due to the scarce funding promoting competition rather than cooperation among organizations. On the other hand, the organizations promoting "family agenda" and the "right to life" seem to blossom and network among themselves, regardless of potential religious differences. Their funding they receive and the mobilization power they have surpass the capacities of the feminist organisations, and their activities/initiatives are supported by the governing structures. These organizations seem to be connected to similar organizations worldwide, promoting conservative ideologies, especially in the context of human rights of women and minorities. In the Balkans, however, their agenda and funding sources are inadequately explored by the domestic feminist organizations. (1)



Progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

Legislative and policy reforms are formal, insufficiently effective due to the lack of gender responsive and accountable institutions to implement these legal and policy reforms. The monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are also missing in many cases or are simply mentioned on paper and not really used into practice.

Deinstitutionalization processes of Gender Equality mechanism are present at all levels. Despite provisions in national legislation and policy documents, the role of gender machinery in some countries is still weak, structures are under-funded lacking staff or other resources. Despite some legislative improvements, the bastions of traditionalism and patriarchal structures in political life are in fact political parties who resist reform and public control. Women's alliances in politics are weak and can be easily divided or controlled from men leadership in political parties, local and national parliaments, etc.

Gender equality is not policy priority - national key programmes rarely include gender equality as a priority, it is mentioned as cross-cutting issue which is never adequately mainstreamed.



Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

- Governments in the Western Balkans should learn from the women's movement about local & regional cooperation, gender transformative participation and women's economic empowerment. A greater emphasis is needed on gender responsive natural and financial resource sharing and inclusion of women in higher value-added economic sectors, such as, STEM, innovation, digital entrepreneurship.
- The Western Balkan and Turkey need to speed up process of peace building and reconciliation through establishing transitional justice to redress the victim/survivor and restore their dignity and to move up internal justice for women survivors of conflict related sexual violence, to boost regional cooperation, reconciliation, and empower women in local peace building.
- There is an urgent need to enhance the impact of international mechanisms that will make governments more committed, responsible and effective in promoting gender equality and women's human rights. In addition to CEDAW and GREVIO, it would be beneficial to establish Independent Girls and Women's Bodies that will be free of the cumbersome bureaucracy and hierarchy of international policy making processes. Beijing+25 processes can allow to strategies about such a mechanism.
- Independent monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations of CEDAW and GREVIO instruments should be more supported, enabling stronger pressure on governments to implement the recommendations more effectively.
- To strengthen national and local mechanisms for gender equality to more effectively design, implement and evaluate policies.
- To increase political and public life participation and representation of women at all levels, legal arrangements such as 'parity laws' should be regulated to ensure equal access of women and men to political office and high-level decision-making positions.
- To take decisive and systematic action in changing cultural patterns through education, public campaigns, public responsibility of traditional and digital media as well as responsibility of politicians and influential people in their public discourse on women and gender equality, relying on the standard 'zero tolerance to violence'.

- To adopt and effectively implement a comprehensive programme for economic empowerment of women, with specific focus to marginalized women, which are often absent from national policies.
- To more effectively combat gender-based violence against girls and women, particularly LBTQI, migrant, ethnic minorities, women from rural areas, women and girls with disability, sex workers etc. and provide comprehensive protection to survivors.
- To provide systematic intersectionality of policies and measures in order to improve the position of women from marginalized groups.
- To support girls participation in decision-making, by creating safe and participatory spaces where rural and urban girls can freely participate, contribute, benefit and get empowered to speak and decide on their behalf and of their peers;
- To adopt legislation and implementation mechanism that will guarantee the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive rights for all women, adolescents and girls, including their right to bodily autonomy and integrity.
- To support local feminist organizations/movements in strengthening their local and regional networks and cooperation, to combat the initiatives aiming to roll back human rights, especially those of women and minorities.

Useful sources

- (1) <https://www.epfweb.org/node/690>